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A WOMAN ON THE NATIONAL TICKET?

A major eastern university recently tried to schedule me for a debate on "Is America Ready for a Woman Vice President?" I declined because that question makes as little sense as "is America ready for a candidate from Minnesota?" The issue is not "a woman" but Geraldine Ferraro.

Let's look at a few hypothetical scenarios. Suppose, instead of Ferraro, Mondale had chosen the highest ranking elected Democratic woman in the country, Kentucky Governor Martha Layne Collins. Political wisdom tells us that being a Governor provides better experience and more visibility for the national ticket than being just a member of Congress. But we had zero speculation by the media about Governor Collins.

Photographers covering the Democratic Convention in San Francisco last month gave us big front-page newspaper pictures of Ferraro with Mondale, happily surrounded by Bella Abzug, Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, Elizabeth Holtzman, Patricia Schroeder, Eleanor Smeal, Judy Goldsmith, Barbara Mikulski, and Mary Rose Oakar. Mondale certainly pleased these leading feminists who had been demanding a "woman" on the ticket.

But do you think they would have gathered round to applaud if Mondale had given the nod to Governor Collins? Not on your life -- because Governor Collins doesn't pass the litmus paper test to get feminist support; she opposes abortion.

If Mondale really wants the South as well as "women," couldn't he have had the best of both worlds by naming Governor Collins or Congresswoman Marilyn Lloyd of Tennessee or Congresswoman Lindy Boggs of Louisiana? Surely, their voices would sound more pleasing to the ears of southern men and women than a New Yorker's.

But they were never in the running because they don't pass the litmus test for support by the feminists in the Democratic Party and the media. Not only would the aforementioned feminist leaders NOT have liked Mondale's choice, they would have stirred up a ruckus that would have given the Democratic Convention unpleasantly high Nielsen ratings.

Is abortion support really all that crucial to feminist political support? You bet

it is. For a case in point, look at Sandra Day O'Connor. When President Reagan named her to the U.S. Supreme Court, the radical feminists grudgingly said a kind word or two about Reagan because his appointee had a pro-abortion record in the Arizona Legislature.

But, in May this year when the New York Women's Bar Association honored her with a Special Award, 60 female lawyers and law professors kicked up a very unladylike flap. They called this selection "incomprehensible and extremely disturbing" and "an affront to all those who seek to overcome discrimination and achieve for women and racial minorities equality and freedom." Her sin, according to these protesting feminists, was her "unbroken record of hostility to reproductive freedom" since she went on the Supreme Court.

According to these educated, articulate feminists, support of abortion is the sine qua non in the definition of "women's rights." If you are not ~~against~~ pro- abortion, they don't think you deserve anything, not even a little bar association award.

That's exactly why the leading feminist organizations refused to back Margaret Heckler in her last run for reelection to Congress from Massachusetts, even though she had faithfully backed every other feminist cause. They don't think that the total of all other feminist issues together add up to as much political importance as being pro-abortion.

To the feminists, it's not whether the candidate is a woman that matters, but whether or not she is a pro-abortion feminist woman. That's their view; but it's not the way the voters respond at the polls.

In 1980, three women ran for the U.S. Senate. The nonfeminist was elected, Paula Hawkins of Florida. The two feminists were defeated, Democrat Elizabeth Holtzman of New York and Republican Mary Buchanan of Colorado.

Ms Buchanan could easily have been elected if she had been a nonfeminist candidate. She was defeated by Gary Hart, a George McGovern Democrat, in a year when all other Senators of that stripe went down to defeat; and she was running in a state where the top of her ticket (Ronald Reagan) was winning by a wide margin.

One of the major issues in the 1984 Presidential campaign this year will be the credibility of the media in reporting about Geraldine Ferraro. Will they tell the truth about <u>why</u> she is getting the support of the feminist groups while other women do not?